Transforming Precollege Education System Effort:

Update & Summary, April, 2011

*Curriculum and Instruction*

Literature suggests research-based promising practices that support student success and instructional effectiveness:

* structured programs that have  well defined program options or prescribed paths to completion
* contextualized instruction in which a content subject area becomes the instructional vehicle for basic skills
* chunking the curriculum in modules and revamping how students learn the material
* acceleration of the rate students move  into college level by restructuring courses using instructional technology or “inclusion” models that provide necessary supports for students in college level classes (e.g., Baltimore County Accelerated Learning Program)
* integrated programs that provide a learning community for students to develop college student skills, form social relationships, clarify aspirations and how to achieve them, and address outside of school challenges that can be barrier to student success
* “inversion” models using technology to move information delivery out of the classroom, freeing up time for higher-level learning (application) and engagement
* “Mainstreaming,” i.e. concurrent enrollment in pre-college and postsecondary coursework
* Collapsing levels of remediation with additional support and creating more customized developmental tracks, e.g. Los Medanos College Statpath model with no minimum placement score, complete all math (precollege and then college-level statistics) in one year. Lowest level students (arithmetic) seven times more likely to pass college math than those in traditional developmental math sequence
* cohort building models that integrate basic skills work with a student’s degree goal area (of particular note is the ACE program model at Cabrillo College which blends a number of the above named models into one with great success)

Other Work related to Curriculum

* A workgroup is mapping the overlapping content in ABE and pre-college math and writing classes: first, describing the current pathways and common curriculum; second, determining how this information can be used to move students faster and with greater success to certificates and degrees.
* The ABE Writing and Math Learning Standards were provided to key representatives from nine colleges (Spokane Falls, Olympic, Clark, Edmonds, Shoreline, Walla Walla, Yakima, Seattle Central and Bellevue); the representatives are working with faculty at these colleges to list pre-college class numbers and content that overlap with the ABE standards.

*Placement Assessment and Diagnosis*

General findings/conclusions regarding placement assessment:

* The most commonly-used placement tests (COMPASS and ACCUPLACER) serve as relatively weak predictors of college-level success but are much less effective at identifying who is likely to benefit from what kind of academic interventions
* A single defined cutoff point on a single tests exaggerates the distinction between “developmental” and “college-ready”
* Current assessment and placement policies around the country do not consistently result in better outcomes for students (Hughes and Scott-Clayton, 2010)
* Many two-year college students are confused about the placement process and are not well-advised (Nodine, Bracco, & Venezia, 2010)
* Students generally take tests without full understanding of purpose and significance
* Tests offer little or no information relevant to faculty or classroom instruction
* Colleges rely solely on single standardized test and have little systematic or ongoing deliberation about placement choices and issues (Safran & Visher, 2010)

Solid research is still spotty at best but the evidence continues to mount that relying on a single standardized test and investing too much in building the perfect cut scores are not particularly useful solutions to improving the placement assessment process in community and technical colleges. At the same time, policy and budget pressures around the nature and role of precollege programs continue to mount as well. In response to those pressures, two-year colleges and systems around the country are beginning to explore and experiment with a wide variety of approaches, including:

1. Using multiple measures rather than a single test, including transcripts and Directed Self-Placement tools
2. Focusing more on diagnostic measures of strengths and weaknesses rather than simple course placement
3. Incorporating the assessment of student attributes and non-cognitive factors into a “college readiness” profile
4. Accelerating student access into college-level work and using diagnostic assessment to target “just-in-time” support
5. Collaborating with K-12 partners to offer early assessment, align curricula, and reduce amount of remediation required by recent high school graduates

More extensive details on the work and membership of the various subgroups can be found at the project wiki site: <http://precollegeeducation.wikispaces.com/home> Recommendations from the various work groups are to be completed by mid-summer and will be presented to the Articulation and Transfer Council in fall 2011.